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ABSTRACT

This study represents the first portion of a two-year program designed to gather baseline data indicating the present state of teacher centering in Texas. The questionnaire designed for the survey focused on three areas: (1) the organization and workings of the teacher center; (2) the communication paths and media within and between teacher centers; and (3) the training and credentialing of school-based personnel who work with preservice and inservice teachers. In order to select a representative sample to respond to the questionnaire, the sixty-four teacher center contact persons designated by the Texas Education Agency were asked to nominate ten individuals. As a result, 513 questionnaires were mailed. Of these, 294 were returned. In terms of the findings of the study, teacher centers are dealing primarily with three areas: (1) procedures and practices related to student teaching, assignment of student teachers, and selection of inservice cooperating teachers; (2) undergraduate program designed to gather preparation programs; and (3) inservice-oriented staff development. Contact between teacher centers appears to be infrequent. Only 38 percent of the sample reported contact with another teacher center; 6 percent reported contact with as many as four. An issue of prime concern to teacher centers is the selection, training, and credentialing of individuals who work in the schools with preservice teachers. The large majority of teacher centers are involved in training supervising teachers. This is an important area that would profit greatly by communication among the centers. (DMT)

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Teacher Centers in Texas: The State of the Scene

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SCHOOL BASED TEACHER EDUCATORS

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TEACHER CENTERS IN TEXAS: THE STATE OF THE SCENE[1,2]

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In the last few years, teacher centering efforts have become widespread nationally and have consumed a great deal of energy on the part of individuals involved with teaching and teacher training at all levels. These efforts are not centralized nor are they standardized; in fact, they consistently defy definition. However, the potential of educators with varying perspectives and roles working together with the aim of higher quality schooling is indeed great. It deserves close scrutiny to determine the specific strengths and the common problems which arise in attempting such an ambitious effort. Since the state of Texas was one of the first to formally establish and support teacher centers, it is appropriate that a preliminary study of teacher centering focus on efforts within this state.

The current study is the beginning of a two-year project. Since it will cover two years, the primary objective this fall was to gather baseline data, to determine the present state of teacher centering in Texas. Most educators who are involved in or knowledgeable of teacher center efforts have questions in common: what organizations and individuals make up teacher centers?, must teacher centers be a physical "place"?, how are the limited resources available more wisely allocated?, how do others best handle certain common problems? The current study sought to tap answers to some of these questions in the hope that just by sharing perspectives and ideas -- both common and unique -- some benefit will arise. During the next two years, the plan is to pursue further the questions raised in the beginning effort.

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[1]The authors greatly appreciate the willing cooperation of the Texas educators who participated in this study.

[2]The authors gratefully acknowledge the consultation of Robert Houston, James Cooper and Al Warner of the University of Houston and Thomas Ryan of the Texas Education Agency who aided in the development and interpretation of this work.

The results of this study will not strike anyone as particularly profound. In general, they reflect what those who are involved in teacher centering in Texas know, or at least suspect to be true. However, knowing what "is" is a start towards determining what "could be" and how to get there. In that way, we hope sharing these results will be useful for teacher centering in Texas.

This short report includes information about procedures used in the study, describes the sample that responded and notes some of the findings about teacher centers. These findings include descriptions of teacher centers themselves, communications within and between them and the current status of training supervising teachers. Finally, we would like to share some of our impressions about the results and their implications.

Procedures

This survey of teacher centers involved two major efforts: (1) constructing a questionnaire that would gather the necessary information most effectively and with the least inconvenience for the respondents, and (2) selecting a sample that could knowledgeably respond from the various teacher centers throughout Texas. Both efforts were carried out in close cooperation with people currently active in teacher centers and others from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) whose responsibilities include teacher center activity.

The questionnaire was constructed to focus on several areas. Two of these areas were the organization and workings of the teacher center and the communication paths and media within and between teacher centers. In addition, a problem that appeared common to all teacher centers was chosen as the focus of part of the questionnaire: the training and credentialing of school-based personnel who work with both pre-service and in-service teachers (a large subset of this group being student teacher supervisors).

In order to select a representative sample to respond to the questionnaire, the sixty-four teacher center contact persons (designated by the Texas Education Agency according to criteria established in 1972) were each asked to nominate approximately ten individuals active in their centers who represented the various constituencies involved (school districts, colleges/universities, teacher organizations, service centers, etc.). Lists were received from two-thirds of this group (57%) and 513 questionnaires were mailed. The 294 people who returned their questionnaires came from various parts of Texas and represented various educational roles:

14%	teachers
27%	school administrators
3%	school district supervisors
18%	college/university administrators
4%	field-based college/university faculty
11%	campus-based college/university faculty
9%	teacher organization representatives
9%	service center representatives
2%	community

Respondents also ranged in how many years they had been involved in their teacher center:

7% less than a year
42% one to two years
36% three to four years
15% more than four years

An inquiry was made into the colleges/universities districts that did not respond initially to the request for lists as to the numbers of teachers they actually certified each year. It was discovered that, although 34% had not responded, this represented only 22% of the teachers certified in Texas. More about this is included later in the report.

The survey data was analyzed by determining percentages and frequency distributions on multiple choice questions and by analyzing the trends represented in the verbal information gathered.

Teacher Center Organization and Activity

One of the first difficulties we and the respondents encountered was a definition problem: "what is a teacher center?" and/or "which should I focus on?". Within Texas alone, there are formally three "kinds" of teacher centers: (1) those established to facilitate one school district/one college dealings with student teachers, known as "student teacher centers," as designated by Senate Bill 8, (2) those established to encourage more programmatic interaction between one or more colleges/school districts/teacher organizations/service centers/ others, known as "local cooperative teacher education centers," designated at the same time as the '72 Standards, and (3) those few centers that have minimal funding and require broader membership and activities, known as TCIES centers. In addition, many other formal and informal operations are being called teacher centers that focus on a large variety of activities.

Most respondents were able to solve this problem for their situation. But, because of lack of communication on our part or lack of familiarity with statewide usage of the term, some found it difficult to choose which organization to focus on. In addition, one fourth of the respondents were actually involved in more than one teacher center; 5% were involved in four.

In terms of findings of the study, teacher centers are dealing primarily with three areas. The first is procedures and practices related to student teaching, such as utilization of Senate Bill 8 funds, assignment of student teachers and selection and in-service of cooperating teachers. The second area is undergraduate preparation programs, including review of college/university programs and suggestions for curriculum changes. The third area is more in-service-oriented staff development, including training in innovations such as team teaching and individualized instruction.

The individual(s) most frequently reported to set agendas and conduct meetings was either (1) a director, chairman or executive committee of the teacher center or (2) a person in a position of authority at the college/university, such as the dean, department chairman or director of student teaching. However, there were several unique arrangements reported:

> "Teacher Center Coordinator who is employed jointly by the local districts and the university"

"Executive committee made of one member from each constituent"

"Chairperson which rotates from year to year between professional organization representative and school district representative"

Teacher centers were seen to be at least fairly active, although meetings were often infrequent, as noted in responses to these questions:

Do you consider your Teacher Center to be:
(95% responding)

inactive 4% : 10% : 29% : 35% : 21% extremely active

How often are you in Teacher Center meetings?
(96% responding)

4%	never	36%	once or twice in the last year	35%	about once every two months	25%	once a month or more often

The college/university and school districts were ranked as most active constituencies in teacher centers, with the former ranked first by 74% of the respondents and the latter ranked first by 61%. Service centers and professional organizations vie for third and fourth rank, and community representation follows in degree of activity. However, each of these constituencies was seen as most active in individual cases.

Communication

Communication between teacher center members and others outside the teacher center is also of interest in this study. When asked about how many of the other teacher centers they had knowledge, the response was:

0%	all of them (55 - 64)	2%	many (11 - 15)
1%	all but a few (45 - 54)	13%	several (6 - 10)
0%	more than half (35 - 44)	30%	only a few (3 - 5)
1%	about half (25 - 34)	23%	a couple (1 - 2)
2%	less than half (16 - 24)	29%	none other than my own

Most of the respondents had knowledge of from none to five other teacher centers, with very few knowing about more than ten.

Contact between teacher centers appears to be infrequent. Only 38% of the sample reported contact with another teacher center and only 6% reported contact with as many as four others. Of the 121 teacher centers whose names were identified by respondents as those they had had contact with, the Dallas teacher center was listed 39 times and the Houston teacher center, 31 times.

When contacts are made with other teacher centers, they are usually once or twice a year and most frequently occur either at professional conferences or through face-to-face interactions. Newsletters and correspondence do not appear to be used for teacher center communication at this time.

Contacts between teacher center members and other outside persons, agencies or institutions in relation to teacher center activities are also infrequent. Only 49% of the sample indicated any outside contact and, of these, 60% reported only one contact. Various professional associations, TEA, colleges and service centers were listed with no entry having a particularly high frequency. As before, these contacts are primarily once or twice a year in either professional conferences or face-to-face interactions.

Activity Concerning Supervising Teachers

Several issues of prime concern to teacher centers are the selection, training and credentialing of individuals who work in the schools with pre-service teachers. A series of questions probed what teacher centers were doing in this area.

The large majority of teacher centers are involved in training supervising teachers each year. This was revealed in responses to two questions:

> In your Teacher Center, do the teachers who have student teachers receive special training before or concurrent with their having student teachers? (94% responding)

81% yes 19% no

> How often do supervising teachers receive in-service training related to their supervisory role? (84% responding)

13% never 1% once in five years 10% once every other year 76% every year

The nature of supervising teacher training varies widely in content and extent. Two kinds of responses appeared most often. The first kind describes in-service focused on the duties and responsibilities of supervising teachers. These sessions are often short in duration:

> "1. Go over handbook for student teachers. 2. Review school district policies regarding student teachers. 3. Grading and reporting. 4. Meeting and working with university supervisory personnel. 5. How to supervise student teachers."

> "One in-service seminar is held each semester; the topics vary."

The other kind of in-service that was mentioned often was of much greater duration and substance, often involving a semester's course (17 respondents mentioned a specific course):

> "They may register for a three hour graduate course -- The Supervision of Student Teaching -- or they may participate in the in-service without credit. The program features training in the various aspects of working with student teachers, i.e., lesson planning, conferencing, observation of teaching, feedback to students."

Another question probed was who conducts training sessions. Responses were:

159	university professors	49	service center personnel
125	school administrators	53	outside consultants
131	university student teacher supervisors	11	other (please specify)
63	other supervising teachers		(raw count of number of checks)

It appears that there are a lot of development plans and activity with regard to defined future training experiences for supervising teachers. This is illustrated by the responses to questions about lists of competencies and sets of training materials:

Has your Teacher Center developed a list of competencies for supervising teachers? (83% responding)

28%	completed	43%	working on it	8%	going to start this year	21%	no plans to begin development

Does your Teacher Center have special materials for training supervising teachers? (76% responding)

34%	yes	24%	working on our own	12%	going to start working on our own this year	30%	no plans to begin development

A question about selection of supervising teachers brought varying responses. Of the 25% who responded in detail about how they wanted to change selection procedures, three categories of responses emerged:

1. Desire for more cooperative selection

> "College supervisors should have more input as they are on the scene from year to year and know the teachers' capabilities."

> "I would like to see a representative of the local teacher organization take a more important part in the selection process."

"A selection procedure involving school district personnel, university personnel, service center personnel and teacher center personnel jointly"

2. Desire for more competent supervising teachers

"We need a list of competencies in supervisor skills and then select only those who fill the requirements."

"I would like to see the screening done by people who recognize good teaching procedures and strategies, teachers who are warm, accepting and who are not threatened by the exceptionally bright students."

3. Indicate general dissatisfaction, no specific recommendations

"I think there should be a better way. We have not been able to improve it."

"A more carefully planned program"

Overall Impressions

It has been possible in looking through nearly a hundred pages of printouts of responses and in reflecting upon the many phone calls received during the course of this survey, to arrive at some overall impressions of the current state of teacher centering in Texas. In many ways, our findings confirm many of the impressions of those who are knowledgeable about and involved in statewide teacher center efforts. However, it is hoped that this report will provide a common knowledge base from which to work towards realizing the great potential of teacher centering. The following is a summary of our impressions from the data:

1. There are as many organizational structures and operational procedures as there are teacher centers. There is literally no way to describe a typical Texas teacher center; instead, there are various configurations and combinations of local needs, resources and legislative requirements.

2. There is not extensive activity within all of the teacher centers surveyed. It appears that less than ten meet frequently and regularly and involve themselves in activities well beyond the basic requirements of facilitation of student teaching.

3. There is a <u>great deal</u> of underlying fermentation, a lot of intense interest in there being more activity in Texas teacher centers. Teacher centering is viewed as a meaningful, relevant and viable means for improving both the pre- and in-service training of teachers, and a large number of our sample seem frustrated that they are unable to do more than they already are doing. This is especially true of the school-based and service center-based respondents.

4. There is also a great deal of interest in knowing what other teacher centers are doing and how they operate. However, communication channels are almost nonexistent. What communication exists is on an infrequent (once or twice a year) and primarily individual basis

through conferences and meetings. In the search for information about other centers, these communication channels could be utilized in a more organized fashion to increase knowledge and inter-center activity.

5. One area of wide-spread activity is the training of supervising teachers. In many places, competencies are being specified and training materials developed. This is an area that may profit greatly by communication between teacher centers since many may indeed be involved in reinventing the same wheels.

6. A primary concern expressed by many in our sample is the lack of funds or effective ways of using the funds already available. This was not explored as much as it could have been, and in the next survey, it will be given more emphasis. It is our impression that many centers, particularly those connected with smaller colleges and school districts, are overburdened and underfunded, often with very limited person power. Although some manage to overcome these problems to a limited extent, they are still not always able to do more than the basics.

7. There is a definite and large number of concerned and committed educators in schools, professional associations, the community, service centers, colleges and universities, Texas Education Agency and the legislature that want to see more happening in our teacher centers.

The data gathered in this survey clearly indicate that there is a critical mass of people and ideas spread across the teacher centers throughout Texas. There appear to be very constricted resources and almost nonexistent communication between centers. If it is possible to capture, organize and interface the energies and commitments that are there, Texas teacher centering in its many forms has the potential to take another large step forward.